

# MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM

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***\*\*ADVISORY – Important Information\*\****

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**TO:** All HAN Recipients

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**SUBJECT:** Maine CDC/DHHS Advises Caution in Heat

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Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)  
(Formerly Bureau of Health)

# **Maine CDC/DHHS Advises Caution in Heat: Keep Cool, Drink Fluids, and Lie Low**

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Parts of Maine will experience unusually hot weather over the next two days. Heat and humidity will be highest on Thursday and persist through Friday in the southern and southwestern parts of the state, especially in York, Cumberland, and Oxford Counties. Nighttime temperatures will also be higher than usual. Extreme heat can be dangerous, and the Maine CDC is advising Mainers, health care providers, and public health professionals to take precautions to prevent heat illness. Please also note that the Maine Bureau of Air Quality is forecasting poor air quality on Thursday for coastal areas between Kittery and Acadia National Park, which could exacerbate heat-related illnesses, and may further restrict outdoor activities.

### **Why should we be concerned about heat in Maine?**

Heat is a serious health threat. Over the past 30 years in the U.S., more people have died from heat than from all other weather events combined. Prolonged hot weather can be especially deadly; more than 700 people died in a heat wave in Chicago in 1995.

Studies have shown that people who live in northern climates, like Maine's, are more susceptible to heat than people in southern climates, and are affected at lower temperatures. This is probably because people in northern climates are less adapted to heat, and do not have good access to air conditioned spaces.

The Maine CDC has found evidence of heat-related health effects in Maine. Rates of hospitalizations and Emergency Department (ED) visits for all causes were significantly higher during the hottest days of the last decade than during the cooler days. And during two heat waves in 2010, Maine CDC saw a notable increase in hospitalizations and ED visits for heat illnesses.

## **PREVENTING HEAT ILLNESS: INDIVIDUALS**

### *Use Air Conditioning and Cool Water*

- Use air conditioning to cool down or go someplace with air-conditioning such as a store, library, restaurant, or cooling center.
- If you don't have air conditioning in your home, close windows, blinds, or curtains on the sunny side of your house, and open them on the shady side.
- Use an electric fan to cool off. However, be aware that fans will not help as much to cool you off once the temperature reaches the mid-90s.
- Use cool water - take a cool shower or bath.
- Wear loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Stay out of the sun as much as possible.
- Wear sunscreen and a ventilated hat (e.g., straw or mesh) when outside, even if it is cloudy.
- Never leave anyone, including children, pets or those with special needs, in a parked car - even briefly. Temperatures in the car can become dangerous within a few minutes.

### *Drink Fluids*

- Drink more fluids regardless of your activity level.

- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and sugary drinks, since these cause you to lose more body fluids.
- If you are on fluid restrictions or take diuretics, ask your doctor how much fluid you should drink.

### *Lie Low - Rest Frequently*

- Take regular breaks from physical activity – at least a few minutes every hour.
- Avoid strenuous activity during the hottest part of the day (between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.).

### If you work outside:

People who work outside or in other hot environments are more likely to become ill from heat. Workers need to be aware of the symptoms of heat-related illness and take preventive steps:

- Have lots water available and drink one cup every 15-20 minutes. Do not wait until you are thirsty. A sports drink can replace the salt and minerals you lose by sweating. If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.
- Take frequent rest and water breaks in shady or air-conditioned areas.
- Increase rest time between work activities if heavy job tasks cannot be avoided.

### If you must exercise outside:

- Limit outdoor activity to the morning and evening, unless you are in a coastal area between Kittery and Acadia National Park, where air quality advisories are in effect and where outdoor activity in the evening hours should also be limited. See the Maine Bureau of Air Quality Forecast website ([maine.gov/dep/air/ozone/](http://maine.gov/dep/air/ozone/)) for more information.
- Drink two to four glasses of cool, non-alcoholic fluids each hour. A sports drink can replace the salt and minerals you lose by sweating. If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.
- Rest often in shady areas – at least every hour.
- Protect yourself from the sun. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses. Put on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products say “broad spectrum” or “UVA/UVB protection” on their labels).

## **RECOGNIZING HEAT ILLNESS**

Recognize and treat the signs of heat-related illnesses as early as possible to prevent serious illness and death.

**Heat stroke** is the most dangerous heat illness. Warning signs include hot, dry, red skin, no sweating, rapid pulse, body temperature above 105° F, headache, loss of alertness, confusion, rapid and shallow breathing, and unconsciousness or coma. If you see someone with these signs, call 911 immediately and move the person to a cool or shady place, loosen their clothes, and cool them rapidly with ice, fans, cool water, or wet cloths.

**Heat exhaustion** is less severe than heat stroke, and occurs when people over-exert themselves in high heat and humidity. Symptoms include heavy sweating, fainting, vomiting, cold, pale, and clammy skin, dizziness, headache, nausea and weakness. Move the person to a cool place, have them drink fluids and rest, loosen their clothes, and cool them off with water or wet cloths. Heat exhaustion can quickly lead to heat stroke. If symptoms worsen or do not improve, get medical help.

Other heat-related conditions include: heat cramps, dehydration, sunburn and heat rash. For more information about these go to <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/heat/general/infor.shtml>

## **VULNERABLE GROUPS**

Everyone should take some simple measures to prevent heat-related illness. Some people, like those listed below, are more likely to experience illness from heat and should take extra precautions to keep cool.

- Older adults (age 65 and older)
- Infants and young children
- People with a mental illness or who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- People who work outside
- People with heart conditions, kidney disease, diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure
- People with mobility restrictions
- People living in poverty and who are homeless

More information on these groups is available at Maine CDC's Heat Illness page:

<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/heat/index.shtml>.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Maine CDC Heat Illness Information

<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/heat/index.shtml>

Current Heat Index Conditions and Forecast (click on your location for up-to-date information)

*Northern Maine*

<http://www.erh.noaa.gov/gyx/gridpoint.php>

*Southern Maine*

<http://www.erh.noaa.gov/car/>

US CDC Extreme Heat Prevention Guide

[http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat\\_guide.asp](http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp)

US CDC Extreme Heat Media Toolkit

<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/extremeheat/>

National Weather Service Heat Wave Guide

[http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/heat\\_wave.shtml](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/heat_wave.shtml)